

GRASSROOTS POWER: THE UTAH EAGLE FORUM, 1972-2009

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH GRADUATE SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

How and why has a group of conservative housewives become the most powerful lobbying group in one of the most populous states in the Mountain West? Since its founding in 1972, the Eagle Forum has risen to prominence as a dominant force in Utah state politics. This formidable conservative grassroots social movement shaped legislation, influenced elections, and advocated an agenda that is unwavering in its support of families, Christianity and small government. The Utah Eagle Forum's power is unparalleled by other state chapters of the organization.

This thesis explores the efforts of housewife-activists to advance conservative agendas at local and state levels of government in Utah. In a complex milieu of Mormonism, Western libertarianism, changing gender roles and shifting national politics, the Utah Eagle Forum has assumed the role of moral "watchdog" over state politics. From its beginnings as a single issue organization opposed to the ERA, to its efforts to form coalitions empowering housewives with a voice in politics, its cultivation of a phone tree an efficient statewide mobilization tool and a notorious reputation for vigilant legislative lobbying, the Utah Eagle Forum is an example of the possibilities for right wing women's activism in a conservative political environment. This paper dramatically expands historians' understanding of the Eagle Forum at the local level as it explores the roles and activities of conservative women in twentieth-century American social movements.

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## INTRODUCTION

On January 17, 2009, two hundred men and women gathered at Salt Lake Community College's Free Enterprise Center for the Utah Eagle Forum conference. Tables outside the auditorium touted the agendas of other right wing activist groups. They sold books by conservative authors and Mormon religious art and offered deals on wedding photography. People clamored to meet with a disbarred Florida lawyer who crusaded against violent video games and a freedom-preaching U.S. senator from Oklahoma, just a few of the speakers invited to the event. Breaking only for meals, committed listeners diligently took notes, interrupted speakers with quotes from scripture, and occasionally gave standing ovations to activists, authors, and state and federal officials who presented a pro-gun, pro-family, pro-life agenda.

The program for the day was a who's who of Utah's most conservative politicians, invited to present policy initiatives and curry favor with Eagle Forum activists. Chris Buttars, a senior Republican state senator renowned for political incorrectness, took the stage to speak about issues before the coming legislative session. He said nothing of the recession, but spoke of the efforts of local activists to pass bills supporting gay rights. That morning, while preparing for the conference, he encountered four gay rights activists in his neighborhood drumming up support and handing out loaves of dessert breads. Buttars spoke in detail about the gay

rights peril, but remained focused on the bread. Insinuating that it had been poisoned, Buttars held up the loaf for everyone to see. "I brought it because I'd like somebody to test it." The crowd erupted in laughter and applause. When Utah Eagle Forum president Gayle Ruzicka joined him on the stage, she quipped that if the gay rights activists had known that Buttars would see her that day, they might have sent along more of the allegedly contaminated bread. The joke was well received.<sup>1</sup>

Although political and legislative disagreements have not yet inspired a poisoning, the joke is a product of Utah's polarized political culture. The state legislature convenes for annual battles over individual rights and state responsibility. Conservatives lobby to restrict liquor sales, contraceptive access, and homosexual rights as they seek to expand parental rights in public education, allow guns on college campuses, and lower taxes. In a complicated milieu, conservatives reconcile libertarianism and strict constitutionalism with calls for traditional values and social restraint.

The political scene in Utah is not unique. In the face of the growing power of government and the perceived degradation of family values, religious institutions, and traditional gender roles, American conservatives mobilized to defend the nation, morality, and the unborn. The New Right emerged in the 1970s as a political force when conservatives formed a variety of single-issue organizations and grassroots movements to seize control from liberals. The Eagle Forum, a successful multi-issue group, emerged at this time. Founded by Phyllis Schlafly in 1972, the

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Buttars, "Common Sense Initiative" (speech, Utah Eagle Forum conference, Sandy, UT, Jan. 17, 2009).



Eagle Forum challenged women to become participants in the political process with Biblical injunctions for action—to “fly on the wings of eagles” and be “doers of the word, and not hearers only.”<sup>2</sup>

This call for civic engagement mobilized women throughout the country, making the Eagle Forum one of the more prominent organizations of the New Right. A national organization divided into state chapters, the Eagle Forum’s achievements in Utah have been particularly notable. Established in 1972, the Utah Eagle Forum has transformed from a small group of lobbyists into a statewide organization that can mobilize thousands of women quickly. In a political context conducive to the organization’s conservative agenda, the Utah Eagle Forum has prospered and assumed a role in decision-making. The Eagle Forum’s family-focused ideology has influenced legislation, bolstered lawmakers and strengthened the hold of the right on Utah’s political future.

In spite of the successes of the Eagle Forum, many histories chronicling the rise of the New Right have focused almost exclusively on men. Historians have emphasized the contributions of iconic politicians Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, preacher Jerry Falwell, and publisher William Buckley Jr. Movements men founded, such as the John Birch Society and the Moral Majority, have also received much attention. Though such heroes are credited with the rise of conservatism, a growing historiography chronicles the contributions of women to conservative social movements well before World War II. They suggest that women have been integral to the Right’s ascendancy since its beginning. Women played crucial roles

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 40:30; James 1:22.

in advancing the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution to prohibit liquor manufacture, distribution, and sales. During the 1920s, the Women of the Ku Klux Klan (WKKK) employed racist and nativist rhetoric to promote morality and social welfare and to wage campaigns against private schools and bootlegging. Women on the far right launched a “mother’s movement” in opposition to World War II to protect their sons and to support Hitler’s fight against communism.<sup>3</sup>

The developing literature about post-World War II conservative women has characterized their activities as limited to the home, voting precinct, and school district. Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound* addresses the efforts of homebound anticommunists; Mary C. Brennan’s *Wives, Mothers and the Red Menace* identifies women’s anticommunist efforts in their communities. In *Suburban Warriors*, Lisa McGirr portrays women as “kitchen-table activists,” who held events in their homes to educate neighbors about conservative causes.<sup>4</sup> Works by Michelle Nickerson and Catherine Rymph chronicle women’s involvement in the Republican Party. Women stuffed envelopes and canvassed neighborhoods to do Republican Party

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<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Matthew Lassiter, “Inventing Family Values,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. B. Schulman and J. Zelizer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006); Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jonathan Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jonathan Schoenwald, “We Are an Action Group: The John Birch Society and the Conservative Movement in the 1960s,” in *The Conservative Sixties*, ed. D. Farber and J. Roche (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003); Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism* (Boulder: The University Press of Colorado, 2008); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 6.

“housework” but accomplished little in terms of leadership and policy influence.<sup>5</sup> Battles over racial busing policies and neighborhood integration yielded more intense engagement from conservative women but inspired few changes in their traditional political roles.<sup>6</sup>

These works present conservative women as involved in a brand of activism that was only part-time and often subordinate. The mobilization of the 1950s and 60s did not produce, in historian Catherine Rymph’s words, lasting “Republican feminism.”<sup>7</sup> Women’s efforts are overlooked as men are credited with sustaining American conservatism’s power. Even histories of the right usher these anonymous women back to their homes in 1981 in time to cede the stage to President Ronald Reagan. While their liberal adversaries receive historians’ praise, the contributions of legions of women who fought the conservative movement’s culture wars are dismissed.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, women’s involvement in right politics did not end with the failure of ERA and the attainment of a conservative White House. The conservative ascendancy

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<sup>5</sup> Michelle Nickerson, “‘The Power of a Morally Indignant Woman’: Republican Women and the Making of California Conservatism,” *Journal of the West* 42 (Summer 2003); Michelle Nickerson, “Moral Mothers and Goldwater Girls,” in *The Conservative Sixties*, ed. D. Farber and J. Roche, (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003), 51-62; Michelle Nickerson, “Domestic Threats: Women, Gender and Conservatism in Cold War Los Angeles, 1945-1966,” (PhD Diss., Yale University, 2003); Catherine Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Rymph, *Republican Women*, 189.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Marjorie Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. B. Schulman and J. Zelizer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71-89; Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA Failed: Politics, Women’s Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986). Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

was not the death knell of Republican feminism nor a “backlash” against feminism.<sup>9</sup> Rather, conservative women whose politics, evangelical faith, and conceptions of morality were inextricably intertwined became dominant figures in the New Right.<sup>10</sup> The history of the Utah Eagle Forum, one of the country’s most successful and sustained conservative social movements, suggests the important role women played in the rise of the New Right.

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<sup>9</sup> Rymph, *Republican Women*, 225-227; Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York, Crown Publishers Inc., 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 4.

## UTAH AND GRASSROOTS CONSERVATISM IN THE 1970s

During the early 1970s, Utah was a state marked by growth. The 1970 Census revealed that Utah's population rose to 1,059,273— an eighteen percent jump in ten years.<sup>11</sup> Populations declined in rural areas and in Salt Lake City and Ogden as new suburban developments appeared along Interstate 15, yielding population booms in communities like Bountiful, Sandy, and Layton.<sup>12</sup> Ninety-eight percent of the people counted were white; only 25,163 people of color lived in the state.<sup>13</sup> Manufacturing and energy resource development drove the state's economy as businesses moved into the state, lured by Utah's pro-business culture and educated populace.<sup>14</sup>

Mormon hegemonic power touched the daily lives of Utah's growing population. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) claimed seventy-one percent of Utahns as members.<sup>15</sup> Sociologists at the time found that living in a predominantly LDS population influenced higher birth rates among Utah Mormons.<sup>16</sup> The LDS church owned the local newspaper *Deseret News* and radio

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population Utah, Volume 1, Part 46* (Washington, DC 1970), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Wiley and Robert Gottlieb, *Empires in the Sun: The Rise of the New American West* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1982), 163.

<sup>15</sup> Howard C. Nelson, *Membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Areas* (1971).

<sup>16</sup> Brian L. Pitcher, Evan T. Peterson and Phillip R. Kunz, "Residency Differentials in Mormon Fertility," *Population Studies* 28, no. 1 (March 1974), 146.

and television stations. Support from LDS leaders, or even inferred endorsements, had powerful political impact for churchgoers. Aware of this power, church leaders organized a Special Affairs Committee to manage its political interests.<sup>17</sup>

Politicians from both parties were elected to Utah's state and federal offices in the decades following World War II. Democrats and Republicans traded control of the state legislature. Republican U.S. Senator Wallace Bennett was popular and swayed voters with his anticommunist and procapitalist platform. He won four consecutive terms from 1950-1974. U.S. Senator Frank Moss and Governor Calvin Rampton were successful moderate Democrats during the 1960s and 70s. However, the parity between parties belied a shift towards conservatism and Republicans at the grassroots.

Utah's right turn coincided with national and regional trends. Early post-war conservative movements appealed strongly to Mormon Utahns concerned about godlessness and preservation of the United States, eliciting the support of prominent LDS leader ("apostle") Ezra Taft Benson. Benson served as Secretary of Agriculture during the Dwight Eisenhower Administration and was a popular advocate of conservative values. Aligned with the John Birch Society, Benson used the pulpit to emphasize the importance of political liberty to Mormonism. In 1974, Benson told an interviewer that he believed it would be difficult for someone who "was living the gospel and understood it" to be an active Mormon and liberal

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<sup>17</sup> Frank H. Jonas and Dan E. Jones, "The 1970 Election in Utah," *The Western Political Quarterly* 24, (June 1971), 345; Michael B. Toney, Carol McKewen Stinner, and Stephan Kan, "Mormon and Nonmormon Migration in and out of Utah," *Review of Religious Research* 25 (December 1983): 114; Wiley and Gottlieb, *Empires in the Sun*, 161.

Democrat.<sup>18</sup> Though the church publicly refuted the statement, Benson's prominence as a church leader ensured that his political views left an indelible mark on the political thinking of Utahns.<sup>19</sup>

This positioning was crucial as the 1960s had dramatically changed America's social and political landscape. The counterculture movements of the 1960s had legitimized drug use, conflicts with authority, and sexual promiscuity. Feminists and gay rights activists opened a national dialogue on equal rights. Government welfare programs expanded in Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. In 1973, the Supreme Court legalized abortion in its *Roe v. Wade* decision. Opposition to the failed war in Vietnam and the moral failings of Richard Nixon fueled national shame. Racial unrest triggered a white backlash and exodus to the suburbs.

In Utah, LDS leaders expressed concerns about the changing moral standards and inspired members to act. In response to the sexual revolution, the women's movement, and issues such as abortion, official publications transmitted the church's position to the membership. The first issue of the monthly church magazine *Ensign* featured an article by Apostle Thomas S. Monson entitled "The Women's Movement: Liberation or Deception?"<sup>20</sup> Invoking scriptural evidence and media coverage tying feminism to the communist philosophies of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, Monson counseled women to channel their energies into their

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<sup>18</sup> "Support for Candidate Possible Some Day, LDS Apostle Says," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 22, 1974, B1.

<sup>19</sup> Examples include Ezra Taft Benson, "The American Heritage of Freedom: A Plan of God," *Improvement Era* 64 (Dec. 1961): 955; Ezra Taft Benson, "Be Not Deceived," *Improvement Era* 66 (Dec. 1963): 1063-1065. A collection of Benson's anticommunist speeches was published in 1964; see Ezra Taft Benson, *Title of Liberty: A Warning Voice* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964). For a discussion of Benson's political influence, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 66-115.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas S. Monson, "The Women's Movement: Liberation or Deception?" *Ensign*, January 1971, 17.

husbands, homes, and church rather than into the “weakness of will” that women’s rights movements represented.<sup>21</sup>

Church leader Harold B. Lee, a member of the First Presidency, told members in the church’s General Conference that 1972 represented, “the beginning of an intense political activity, when men of every persuasion in the political arena will be clamoring for attention and acceptance by the electorate.” He predicted, “There will be controversy, debate, conflict, and contention.”<sup>22</sup> Lee asserted that the agendas of a “well-organized loud minority,” undoubtedly one with a liberal social agenda, marred contemporary politics. He called upon church members, as a part of the “greater majority of those who might be less vocal but whose cause is just and in accordance with righteous principles” to stand up for the church’s “political faith.”<sup>23</sup> The 1970s were a time for Latter-day Saint people to shun their membership in the silent majority to ensure that politicians represented their values.

This position was reaffirmed in April of 1974, when newly ordained church President Spencer W. Kimball made a plea for political engagement. Affirming previous policies, he said, “We urge Church members to attend the mass meetings of their respective political parties and there exercise their influence.”<sup>24</sup> Quoting evangelist Billy Graham, previous church leaders, and scripture, he decried “ugly acts and activities” such as abortion and divorce and implored women to be mothers and members to be chaste.<sup>25</sup> Kimball fused the political action of members and the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Harold B. Lee, “A Time of Decision,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, “Guidelines to Carry Forth the Work of God in Cleanliness,” *Ensign*, May 1974, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



moral standards of the church as he called members to proclaim Mormonism's teachings to the world. "This, then, is our program: to reaffirm and boldly carry forward the work of God in cleanliness, uprightness, and to take that gospel of truth to that world that needs so much that godly life."<sup>26</sup> These essays and talks reflected a large number of articles and transcripts published in the *Ensign* that lambasted feminism, denounced immorality, and focused on ideal womanhood. The increased emphasis on traditional gender roles and calls for political involvement drew attention and support. When combined with the growing conservative reaction to the 1960s, the stage was set for the rise of the Utah Eagle Forum.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Laura Vance, "The Evolution of Ideals for Women in Mormon Periodicals, 1897-1999," *Sociology of Religion* 63, (Spring, 2002), 98.

## STOP-ERA AND THE RISE OF THE UTAH EAGLE FORUM

The story of the national Eagle Forum begins with its founder, conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly. A Radcliffe-educated housewife from Missouri, Schlafly built an impressive political resume as she reared her children. Involved with community groups and the Illinois Federation of Republican Women, she gained renown in two failed runs for Congress and her involvement in the National Federation of Republican Women. She worked with family members to form the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation in 1958, a Catholic version of the Protestant Christian Anti-Communism Crusade. Schlafly drew national attention in 1964 for her popular anticommunism book *A Choice Not an Echo* that promoted Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign. As an author, politician, lobbyist, orator, and leader of numerous political organizations, she was admired for her ability to translate the ideas of conservatism into a populist language that encouraged people to act.<sup>28</sup>

The passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972 incited Schlafly to action. The succinct amendment stated, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions

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<sup>28</sup> Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 168.

of this article.”<sup>29</sup> Congress sent the amendment to the states with a seven-year period for ratification. In spite of having championed traditional gender roles throughout much of her political career, Schlafly initially dismissed the ERA as “something between innocuous and mildly helpful.”<sup>30</sup> A friend challenged Schlafly to investigate the implications of the ERA. Further study convinced her that it posed a greater threat to families than national security issues. In 1972 she founded Stop Taking Our Privileges-Equal Rights Amendment (STOP-ERA) and launched a campaign to prevent the amendment’s ratification by the states.

To combat the ERA, Schlafly asserted that the United States had a lengthy history of gendered rights and citizenship obligations. STOP-ERA’s ideology focused on the belief that men and women were fundamentally different, physically and emotionally, and thus had distinct responsibilities. Schlafly claimed that her crusade was more about the preservation of women’s political protections—keeping them from combat, away from abortionists, and safe at work through gendered labor laws—than impeding equality. Such laws, she argued, sustained traditional families. The integrity of families with a breadwinning father, a housewife, and children depended upon an understanding that men and women had different roles in society.

Schlafly prophesied that the ERA would trigger moral degeneration by blurring gender difference. Because the fate of America depended on its moral superiority, housewives were called to defend their “careers” as homemakers for

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<sup>29</sup> “Constitutional Amendments Not Ratified,” U.S. House of Representatives, <http://www.house.gov/house/Amendnotrat.shtml>.

<sup>30</sup> Phyllis Schlafly quoted in Carol Felsenthal, *Phyllis Schlafly: The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1982), 240.

inadvertently became the face of STOP-ERA. Schlafly called STOP-ERA the “most loosely organized organization you will ever be associated with.”<sup>34</sup>

By the end of 1973, thirty states had rushed to ratify the amendment; only eight more states needed to ratify for passage. When the Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women advocated the ERA’s passage in Utah, the opposition rallied. STOP-ERA joined an informal coalition of conservative groups to change sentiment toward the ERA. The Freeman Institute, a conservative think tank based in Provo, featured Schlafly on the cover of its newsletter, *The Freeman Report*. Women for Constitutional Government, a Utah PAC, petitioned Schlafly for STOP-ERA materials. Beginning in 1974, Conservative Caucus leader Dennis Kerr organized a number of informational mass-meetings that featured Carol Garbett as a keynote speaker. The John Birch Society backed Humanitarians Opposed to the Degradation of Our Girls (HOTDOGS), an anti-ERA organization founded in southern Utah. HOTDOGS distributed STOP-ERA materials. Concerned citizens alarmed about the dangers of an Equal Rights Amendment collaborated with STOP-ERA to ensure its defeat. This joint mobilization was critical to the ERA’s defeat in Utah. Having engaged other conservatives, Phyllis Schlafly turned her attention to an organization with greater reach and broader influence: the LDS church.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.; Phyllis Schlafly, quoted in Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 220.

<sup>35</sup> The Freeman Institute, “Equal Rights Amendment,” *Freeman Report*, January 15, 1973, 1; Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 13; Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 138; Bonnie Bruce, letter to Phyllis Schlafly, Nov. 30, 1973, Box 19, file 3, ERA State Action Series, Phyllis Schlafly Collection, Eagle Forum Archives, St. Louis, Missouri; Jenny McGee Harris, “The Silent Majority: Conservative Perception, Mobilization and Rhetoric at the Utah State International Women’s Year Conference” (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2005), 53; Garbett, interview; Margaret I. Miller and Helene Linker, “Equal Rights Amendment Campaigns in

Phyllis Schlafly understood that the LDS church was integral to her efforts in Utah. Utah House of Representatives member Georgia Peterson corresponded with Phyllis Schlafly and told her of meetings with LDS Relief Society President Belle Spafford. Schlafly responded, "I am thrilled with your contact with the Mormon church. Good support for our cause from the Mormons should assure us of victory in Utah and Nevada, especially. You might inquire as to which of your states the Mormons are strong in."<sup>36</sup> Schlafly was keenly aware of the strategic benefit of an alliance with the LDS church.

When Phyllis Schlafly visited Salt Lake City in November 1974, Peterson arranged a meeting with new Relief Society President Barbara Smith. Of meeting with Schlafly, Smith recalled, "I told her that I didn't think the church would take a stand against the ERA because they only took a stand against moral issues. They tried not to become involved in political issues."<sup>37</sup> Schlafly assured Smith that "she felt that the ERA was one of the greatest moral issues of our day and that it would be very destructive to the family."<sup>38</sup> Smith was challenged to revisit the issue. Like Schlafly, Smith's reevaluation was a catalyst for action. After meeting with Schlafly, Smith "felt that maybe we needed to do something more about it."<sup>39</sup> The following month, Smith made an anti-ERA speech at the LDS Institute of Religion in Salt Lake

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California and Utah," *Society* 11 (May 1974), 42-43; Marilyn Warenski, *Patriarchs and Politics: The Plight of the Mormon Woman*, (New York: Mc-Graw-Hill Book Company, 1978), 185.

<sup>36</sup> Phyllis Schlafly letter to Georgia Peterson, November 19, 1973, Box 19, file 3, ERA State Action Series, Phyllis Schlafly Collection, Eagle Forum Archives, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Smith, interview by Jessie Embry, July 8, 1977, James Moyle Oral History Collection, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

City, setting into motion the church's campaign against the ERA.<sup>40</sup> Phyllis Schlafly's efforts served as a catalyst for official Mormon involvement in the fight against the ERA. As the LDS Church emerged as a strong opponent on the anti-ERA side, the impact of this meeting cannot be understated.

In spite of the ERA's failure in the Utah state legislature in 1972, it was presented for a second time in January, 1975. In anticipation of the vote, the LDS *Church News* published an editorial condemning the ERA. Emphasizing the detrimental effects the ERA would have on women's "special protection and the status properly due them," the editorial reinforced the position Barbara Smith had taken at the Institute, one undoubtedly influenced by Phyllis Schlafly.<sup>41</sup> The editorial denounced the ERA as a threat to traditional roles. The *Church News* editorial was a sure sign the LDS Church opposed the ERA.

STOP-ERA's appeal in Utah grew in tandem with the increasing forcefulness of the LDS Church's rhetoric.<sup>42</sup> STOP-ERA expanded southward into heavily LDS Utah County. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that Rayanna Christiansen, a housewife from East Orem, had organized a STOP-ERA group.<sup>43</sup> "It is imperative that our legislators realize there is great opposition among our people to the amendment because of its known and unknown legal effects," Christiansen told the *Tribune*.<sup>44</sup> Chiefly concerned with the amendment as a state's rights issue, she stated, "STOP-ERA objects to an amendment which would automatically make

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<sup>40</sup> Bradley, 94.

<sup>41</sup> "Equal Rights Amendment," *Church News*, Jan. 12, 1975, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Garbett, interview.

<sup>43</sup> "Utah Group Balks at ERA," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 9, 1975, C12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

sweeping changes in much existing state legislation. Especially hazardous is the great loss of the control of the state legislature over all our personal relations and domestic laws.”<sup>45</sup> Christiansen felt that ceding such power to the federal government would impact parental authority and damage families.

Christiansen hoped that STOP-ERA would become a statewide organization, suggesting that she was unaware of Carol Garbett’s activities in Salt Lake County. Her comments that the ERA represented a “radical transfer of power” from the states to the federal government implied that her focus, and that of the organization, was more conservative than antifeminist.<sup>46</sup> STOP-ERA grew and organized quickly. It had a chapter in every large town in Utah County, including Lehi, Alpine, Pleasant Grove, Springville, Orem, and Provo. Chapter chairs—all women—reported to Christiansen. A week after its organization was reported, *The Utah Independent*, a conservative newspaper affiliated with the American Party and the John Birch Society, honored Christiansen for her efforts to inform citizens about the dangers of the ERA.<sup>47</sup> In February, the combination of grassroots mobilization and church involvement thwarted the ERA’s ratification in Utah for a second time.<sup>48</sup>

Having harnessed the power of antifeminism through STOP-ERA, Schlafly recognized the potential for long-term activism. She changed the organization’s name to Eagle Forum in 1975. Though the ERA remained the focus of its activities, a new name allowed for a broader conservative agenda related to the family and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Joe H. Ferguson, “Citizens Organize to Stop ERA,” *The Utah Independent*, Jan. 16, 1975, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Seldin, “Equal Rights Amendment Suffers Defeat amid Emotional Voting,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1975, 1.

encouraging small government. In 1976, the LDS First Presidency officially declared that defeating the ERA was an essential step to ensuring preservation of the family and implied an endorsement.<sup>49</sup> This alignment of rhetoric between church and movement opened the door to the Eagle Forum's mobilization in Utah.

Following the ERA vote, the national Eagle Forum worked to prepare for the International Women's Year state conference planned for 1977. Because state conferences would provide a voice for women on social issues and elect delegates to the national IWY meeting in Houston, the conference was important to feminists and conservatives alike. Proposals coming from Houston would offer a clear statement about American values. Though the conference was intended to be non-partisan, conservatives bristled that its planners were predominantly feminist and took steps to ensure that their voices were heard.<sup>50</sup>

As soon as Carol Garbett heard about the conference, she copied materials and distributed them widely. Citizens in the Salt Lake Valley came to her home for meetings that drew thirty people at a time.<sup>51</sup> Attendees helped to disseminate anti-ERA materials. She spoke at mass meetings sponsored by Let's Govern Ourselves and the Conservative Caucus.<sup>52</sup> In light of the Eagle Forum's preparations for the IWY and the collaboration of conservative groups, state meeting chairwoman Jan Tyler condemned the efforts of political factions as divisive and disruptive.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "First Presidency Issues Statement Opposing Equal Rights Amendment," *Ensign*, Dec. 1976, 79; Bradley, 99-101.

<sup>50</sup> "1000 Cautioned on Electing Women Delegates," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 24, 1977, B4.

<sup>51</sup> Garbett, interview.

<sup>52</sup> "1000 Cautioned on Electing Women Delegates," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 24, 1977, B4.

<sup>53</sup> Angelyn Nelson, "State Women's Year Leader Urges Unity," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 24, 1977, B2.



Utah IWY conference attendees selected Garbett as a Utah delegate to the national conference, affirming that her involvement in Eagle Forum positioned her as a prominent figure in the conservative community. The delegation had a strong cast of right-wing activists that included Margaret Cassum of Right to Life and Georgia Peterson. Also selected as delegates were prominent women in the LDS church, who if not explicitly political, were presumed to hold traditional beliefs. Utah's delegation gained renown as a vocal conservative minority at the national IWY conference.<sup>54</sup>

The ERA struggle and IWY conference represented the earliest evidence of the Utah Eagle Forum's influence. They also exposed early fractures in the movement. The length of the battle generated friction between Georgia Peterson and other local leaders. In a letter to Phyllis Schlafly, Carol Garbett complained that Peterson, running again for state representative, "has billed herself as the leader of the Conservative delegation (cough!), and the foremost Conservative Leader in the women's movement."<sup>55</sup> In Garbett's eyes, Peterson's greatest folly was in forming alliances with feminists but doing so while calling herself conservative. "We who know the truth think this is ridiculous—we are Conservative and she stays away from those of us who know the difference between action and lip service!"<sup>56</sup> In the wake of ERA collaboration, Peterson's association with feminist activist Bella Abzug, and her efforts to make the newly formed Utah Association of Women a member of a

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<sup>54</sup> Angelyn Nelson, "'Pro-family' delegates plan to be visible in Houston," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, November 15, 1977, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Carol Garbett to Phyllis Schlafly, April 30, 1978, Box 19, file 3, ERA State Action Series, Phyllis Schlafly Collection, Eagle Forum Archives, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

liberal women's coalition were the ultimate betrayal. "To those of us who knew her," Dorothea Masur wrote to Schlafly, "it comes as no surprise."<sup>57</sup>

Georgia Peterson's experience with the Utah Eagle Forum was an early sign of what would become a hallmark of the organization's culture—its intensity. Peterson was what sociologist Rebecca Klatch called a "laissez faire" conservative. She opposed the ERA because she was concerned that the second clause would reduce the power of the states. Though Peterson attended several national events and was even featured in *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, her relationship with the organization grew strained as the Eagle Forum adopted a multi-issue, socially conservative platform.<sup>58</sup> Peterson was courted for leadership in the Utah Eagle Forum but declined because she wanted to remain true to her moderate beliefs.<sup>59</sup>

As chair of the Utah delegation to the IWY, Peterson had drawn the ire of feminists for organizing against the ERA. When she voted with feminists on other social issues at the national IWY conference, she felt the brunt of a conservative public relations assault. *The Utah Independent* featured a series of stories that smeared Peterson as a traitor and touted Carol Garbett's support of the antifeminist platform at the IWY. The anger that Utah Eagle Forum leaders felt and confessed to Phyllis Schlafly worked its way through conservative channels and into the press. Peterson credited the coverage with her decision to resign her legislative seat and give up on a run for Congress. Having contributed to the downfall of a prominent

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<sup>57</sup> Dorothea Masur to Phyllis Schlafly, May 1, 1978, Box 19, file 3, ERA State Action Series, Phyllis Schlafly Collection, Eagle Forum Archives, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>58</sup> "Georgia Peterson," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, March 1976.

<sup>59</sup> Georgia Peterson, interview with author, December 17, 2008, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Utah politician, the Eagle Forum was eager for new battles. Conservative women would not, as historians have suggested, desert their cause and disband.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Margaret Cassum, "1977 Year of Confusion," *The Utah Independent*, March 9, 1978; Erma J. Christensen, "A Corner on Education," *The Utah Independent*, March 23, 1978, 4-6; Peterson, interview.

## LATENCY: DOROTHEA MASUR AND THE UTAH EAGLE FORUM DURING THE REAGAN YEARS

The end of the IWY ushered in a new era both for conservatives and the Utah Eagle Forum. California Governor Ronald Reagan, Utah's candidate in the Republican presidential race of 1976, easily captured the nomination and the presidency in 1980. In Utah he fared particularly well, garnering eighty percent of the vote. Having contributed to the failure of the ERA and the IWY and comfortable with a Republican president in the White House, the Utah Eagle Forum initially demobilized but maintained a small but robust group of supporters. Carol Garbett's involvement waned as she pursued a teaching career. The casual structure of the ERA years gave way to a more formal organization when Phyllis Schlafly appointed Dorothea Masur, a Catholic housewife from Logan, as state chapter president.

As a supply worker in New Jersey and New York during World War II, Masur developed a strong sense of civic commitment. Masur was a military wife and had spent four years living in Germany. When she settled in Ogden near Hill Air Force Base in the early 1970s, Masur found that the sexual revolution, the rise of feminism, and growing secularism had changed society. Masur recalled that she wrote letters to the editor in which she declared that the decline of the family deeply troubled her. Her letters revealed a breadth of concerns; in one she decried the

“golden calf” of over-funded school athletics programs.<sup>61</sup> She called others to action. Reading these letters, Phyllis Schlafly telephoned her and invited her to participate in the Eagle Forum.<sup>62</sup>

Masur felt that feminists went “overboard” in their efforts to undermine gender differences and interpreted the ERA as a ploy to lower the standards of the military to meet the physical needs of women.<sup>63</sup> The culture of the Eagle Forum inspired Masur. “I was astounded at what these women knew and what they were doing... it had never dawned on me that women could be that effective while at the same time raising their families.”<sup>64</sup> For Masur, leading the Utah Eagle Forum meant working to convince women that they could be family oriented and effect change.

The voice that Masur found through her activities with the Eagle Forum and Georgia Peterson’s defeat inspired Masur to run for state representative from Ogden’s fifth district in 1980. Masur ran on a platform that emphasized keeping government out of family matters and providing tax relief. “Utahns are known for raising good families,” a campaign brochure announced. “Mrs. Masur believes there is a new and powerful move back to strong family life aided by less tax burdens.”<sup>65</sup> She promised to work for legislation requiring parental consent for minors to obtain abortions and birth control. Masur advertised her position on the charter board of directors of the Utah Women’s Association and employed a large, prominent graphic

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<sup>61</sup> Dorothea E. Masur, “Letters to the Editor: Need All Activities,” *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, Feb. 15, 1975, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Dorothea Masur, interview by author, August 12, 2008, Ogden, Utah.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Dorothea Masur, campaign brochure, Box 19, file 4, ERA State Action Series, Phyllis Schlafly Collection, Eagle Forum Archives, St. Louis, Missouri.

of an eagle, but did not openly proclaim her affiliation with the Eagle Forum. Masur was elected and served in the state House of Representatives for two years.

Masur's brief tenure as a legislator had a pronounced impact on the Forum. Within the organization, Masur gained a reputation for toughness. Carol Garbett remembers, "She's in the legislature, she doesn't compromise."<sup>66</sup> When faced with challenging issues in the state legislature, Masur regularly called Phyllis Schlafly for advice. She told *The Salt Lake Tribune* that she saw her legislative service and her outsider status as a woman, Catholic, and non-native Utahn as proof that there was no need for the ERA.<sup>67</sup> Though her influence in the House was minimal, Masur's role as a legislator brought credibility to the Eagle Forum and provided it with insider knowledge of legislative processes.

While quietly mobilizing, the Eagle Forum maintained a low public profile during the 1980s. Members held occasional pro-family conferences at Weber State University, but for the most part were devoted to low-key legislative lobbying and the defense of parental rights in schools. Parents often asked Masur to speak at school district and PTA meetings. Of the Utah Eagle Forum during the 1980s, Masur remembers, "We never asked anyone to do anything. It was their family, it was their life. What they could do, they would do, and they did."<sup>68</sup> Concerned less with change in government, Masur emphasized change on a more personal level as she worked to empower housewives to become more vocal citizens. In all,

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<sup>66</sup> Garbett, interview.

<sup>67</sup> Vaughn Roche, "Utahns Gather to Support 'Death' of ERA," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 19, 1981, B1.

<sup>68</sup> Masur, interview.

approximately fifty people were active in the organization during the 1980s, mostly in the Ogden area.<sup>69</sup>

To compensate for their small numbers, the Eagle Forum formed alliances with other social movements. Citizens for True Freedom, a coordinating group based in Ogden, united forty-five conservative organizations to fight Planned Parenthood in 1980.<sup>70</sup> Concerned that Planned Parenthood offered counseling to minors and infringed on parental rights, the Eagle Forum worked with Citizens for True Freedom to circulate petitions challenging its federal funding. Masur collaborated with Senator Orrin Hatch on the issue and attended a White House meeting with President Reagan.<sup>71</sup> Although Reagan supported grants to Planned Parenthood, Masur remained committed to the states' right to manage federal spending on family planning. The campaign proved unsuccessful but enhanced the Utah Eagle Forum's relationship with Citizens for True Freedom.

The alliance with Citizens for True Freedom proved fruitful throughout the 1980s. The founder of Citizens for True Freedom, Joy Beech, was a powerful ally. Beech was renowned for having the largest collection of pornography in Utah as a symbol of her focus on issues related to children and the media. During the mid-eighties she formed a grassroots group called Families Alert. Similar in mission to the Eagle Forum, Families Alert was better organized. Members frequently attended legislative committee meetings; Beech and Masur were often seen at the legislature

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<sup>69</sup> Lois M. Collins, "10,000 Help Make Chain in Support of Child-care Bill," *Deseret News*, June 16, 1990; Jay Evensen, "Utah Ignores Homemakers, Group Says," *Deseret News*, Oct. 2, 1989; Gayle Ruzicka, interview by author, June 5, 2008, Highland, Utah.

<sup>70</sup> "Organization Takes Up Arms," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, June 17, 1980, D1.

<sup>71</sup> Virginia Robicheau, "Routing Aid from Grants Assailed," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, August 6, 1981, B8.

together. Families Alert drew heavy criticism when it challenged AIDS education in public schools, going so far as to send a letter to a local school board with allegations that an AIDS education teacher was homosexual. When Families Alert retreated, Eagle Forum filled a void for conservative women seeking to promote a pro-family agenda.<sup>72</sup>

Still, the path to influence was not clear. Masur struggled with her image in the press. From her days in the legislature, Masur was known among journalists for her extreme and provocative statements. Press coverage placed Masur on the defensive. In 1989, Masur released a statement lambasting the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women. "On the backs of Utah's homemaker," she declared, "they again prove that rhetoric about family is meaningless and the feminist is in control of the statehouse on family issues." A state official dismissed the Eagle Forum as out of touch. "Gov. [sic] Bangerter is committed to bringing this state into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and Dorothea Masur and her group are apparently going to have to be brought kicking and screaming."<sup>73</sup> Another article in which Masur opposed federal child-care legislation maintained that her criticism was "based on misinformation."<sup>74</sup> While Masur was regarded as a representative of conservative women, no one appeared to be taking her or the Eagle Forum seriously as a contender for power in the state.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Rolly, interview by author, Jan. 30, 2009, Salt Lake City, Utah; Dave Jones, interview by author, Jan. 16, 2009, Salt Lake City, Utah; Angelyn N. Hutchinson, "Program Developers Say AIDS Curriculum Would be Sensitive," *Deseret News*, April 16, 1988; Twila Van Leer, "Families Alert Protest Prompts Trainer for AIDS Program to Quit," *Deseret News*, Nov. 23, 1988.

<sup>73</sup> Jay Evensen, "Utah Ignores Homemakers, Group Says," *Deseret News*, Oct. 2, 1989.

<sup>74</sup> Lois M. Collins, "10,000 Help Make Chain in Support of Child-Care Bill," *Deseret News*, June 16, 1990.

<sup>75</sup> Rolly, interview.



## GAYLE RUZICKA: POWER AND INFLUENCE IN STATE POLITICS

Dorothea Masur's personal problems led to her replacement in 1990. In September, she was accused of stealing makeup and earrings from a store at Hill Air Force Base. The scandal destroyed her reputation and career. Burdened with her husband's health problems and family finances, and now laden with bad press, Masur's influence in the approaching winter legislative session was gone. With two phone calls, one releasing Masur and another appointing the new president, Gayle Ruzicka, Phyllis Schlafly made a leadership change that would have a major impact on Utah's political scene.<sup>76</sup>

Gayle Ruzicka had been with the Eagle Forum from the beginning. An active Mormon, the church's stance on the ERA served as a catalyst for her involvement as a young mother during the ratification struggle. The materials Schlafly distributed affirmed Ruzicka's conservative political beliefs; Schlafly's exposition against Republican Party's politics as usual, *A Choice Not an Echo*, was particularly resonant. The organization's strategy of writing letters to government officials provided a convenient tool for political engagement that the busy housewife employed from home. Gayle Ruzicka became an eager subscriber to *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*. While living in Arizona, Ruzicka served on the Eagle Forum state board and grew

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<sup>76</sup> "Ex-Legislator Charged With Shoplifting," *Deseret News*, Sept. 26, 1990; "Ex-Ogden Legislator Faces Charge in HAFB Shoplifting," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Sept. 28, 1990, B15. Jones, interview; Rolly, interview; Peterson, interview; Dorothea Masur, telephone interview, Aug. 21, 2008; Ruzicka, interview.

increasingly committed to homeschooling. Moving to Utah in 1989, Ruzicka immediately sought out the Eagle Forum. She became a vice-president and Masur welcomed her ideas about expanding the organization.<sup>77</sup>

Ruzicka quickly became immersed in the legislative routines that Masur had established. New legislator Dave Jones was on the receiving end of the Eagle Forum's efforts during his first session in the Utah Senate. The Salt Lake Democrat's defeat of incumbent candidate G. LaMont Richards, a prominent Mormon, had been hailed as a significant upset in the 1988 race.<sup>78</sup> After filing a bill during the 1989 legislative session supporting child care in public schools, Dorothea Masur, Gayle Ruzicka, and Joy Beech approached Jones in a hallway at the Capitol Building. As they walked with him, "they wanted to know specifically who had put me up to running this bill." When Jones responded that he had sponsored the bill on his own volition, "they said, 'Well, we're pretty sure this is an NEA [National Education Association] plot to take over our schools and we're hoping you're not leading the charge on that.'" After Jones explained that he was not part of a conspiracy, "they offered, a standing offer, to instruct me in correct principles any time I was willing to sit down."<sup>79</sup> Jones politely declined.

As a vice-president and then as newly appointed president, Ruzicka expanded the organization's reach with new local chapters. To establish these chapters, Ruzicka and her husband toured the state to speak to study groups and civic organizations. At a 1989 presentation at the Sandy Library, Ruzicka's

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<sup>77</sup> Ruzicka, interview.

<sup>78</sup> Jerry Spangler and Joyce E. Cutler, "Utah GOP Still Claims Victory Despite Loss of One House Seat; Demos Dreams of Major Gains Fail to Materialize," *Deseret News*, Nov. 9, 1988.

<sup>79</sup> Jones, interview.

perspectives on education, abortion, and homosexuality appealed to Karen Clark, a young housewife from South Jordan. Clark was invited to the Eagle Forum's monthly board meeting and was appointed a chapter president. At the time, her chapter extended from west Salt Lake and south to suburban Bluffdale, a distance of twenty-five miles. To ensure that she could be with her family, Clark held monthly chapter meetings in her home. Advertising the meetings by letters and word of mouth, three to thirty women came to Clark's home to study the *Phyllis Schlafly Report* and discuss current events. As chapters increased throughout the state, more women became involved.<sup>80</sup>

Part of the appeal of the Eagle Forum in the early 1990s was rooted in the housewife experience in Utah. The state was "family friendly" and the traditional family of a husband and wife and children was normative. Large families were common, with extended families offering a crucial economic and social network. Family and church merged in the neighborhood religious congregations of the Mormons ("wards"). Child and family focused communities prioritized creating healthy and safe environments. Concerns about poor schools, drugs, pre-marital sexuality, and homosexuality motivated political participation. Utah's housewives, as neighbors, sisters, mothers, and daughters, found the means to extend the domestic sphere into the public area to keep their marriages, families and communities secure.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Karen Clark, interview with author, July 7, 2008, South Jordan, Utah.

<sup>81</sup> E. Mark Bezzant and Bruce A. Chadwick, "Education," in *Utah in the 1990s: A Demographic Perspective*, ed. T. Heaton, T. Hirschl and B. Chadwick (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 129; Pam Perlich, "Population Growth, 1970-95," in *Utah in the 1990s: A Demographic Perspective*, ed. T. Heaton, T. Hirschl and B. Chadwick (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 4; Clark, interview; Lisa King Hirschl, "Health and Mortality," in *Utah in the 1990s: A Demographic Perspective*, ed. T. Heaton, T.

Understanding the concerns of housewives and familiar with the social networks that existed in Mormon wards. Ruzicka saw them as opportunities to spread news about political issues and mobilize interested citizens. Ruzicka created a telephone tree to disseminate information quickly. Information shared through the phone tree originated with the issues vice-president who studied policy information and passed it to Ruzicka for review. Ruzicka evaluated the information, decided on policies to pursue, and drafted memos. In matters of legislative importance, the secretary faxed Ruzicka's draft to chapter presidents. Chapter presidents then initiated the "five call five call five" system. Five people telephoned five people who called five more people. The phone tree generated thousands of calls in a matter of hours, often targeted on a particular issue or a particular legislator.<sup>82</sup> The phone tree rapidly became an effective means for participants to mobilize from their homes with a minimal contribution of time.

The phone tree's efficacy stemmed from its flexibility. It allowed participants to be involved without being members; it controlled disagreement within the organization. Ruzicka noted, "Sometimes you'll agree on something and sometimes you'll disagree. We set the telephone tree up in way that if we started calls out to people and we hit somebody that says, 'You know what, I don't feel that way' or 'I don't agree with you on this one' we would have somebody else we could move to next and just say 'Ok, I understand' and move on."<sup>83</sup> The system compensated for

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Hirschl and B. Chadwick (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 41, 57; Thomas A. Hirschl, "Migration and Change: Population and Workforce," in *Utah in the 1990s: A Demographic Perspective*, ed. T. Heaton, T. Hirschl and B. Chadwick (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 63.

<sup>82</sup> Ruzicka, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

the wide range of issues on the agenda of the Eagle Forum, effectively engaging participants by issue. Those on the phone tree who found an issue salient could contact friends and family members beyond the phone tree. The formal nature of the phone tree ensured that the integrity of the message was not compromised, while the informal nature of existing social networks meant that the message reached people in and beyond the organization. The phone tree used existing kinship and neighborhood networks to guarantee that citizens quickly obtained information and acted.

Gayle Ruzicka intensified the Eagle Forum's legislative lobbying presence. Ruzicka and other Eagle Forum leaders attended the forty-five day winter legislative session consistently. Establishing lasting patterns, they went to committee meetings, talked to legislators, and obtained information for dissemination on the phone tree. In the early years of Ruzicka's tenure, the legislative contingent was small, with no more than ten people identifying themselves as Eagle Forum participants on sign-in sheets at committee meetings during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Those attending also belonged to other organizations; Carole McGlothlin often associated herself with the Utah Federation of Republican Women, Rae Howard was director of Health Forum, an antifuoridation group. The Eagle Forum boosted its credibility through ties to other conservative organizations.

Children proved an important component of Ruzicka's legislative strategy. In some regards this was an inadvertent extension of her choice to home school her large family. That Ruzicka would appear at the legislature with up to six children every day was a potent symbolic representation of the Forum's family focused

agenda. Other home schooling mothers in the organization followed Ruzicka's example; one woman noted that the Capitol building was a "second home" to her six children because she did not care to leave them with a babysitter.<sup>84</sup> Next to their names, children identified themselves on committee attendance sheets as "Jr. Eagle Forum" or "concerned child."<sup>85</sup> Bringing children to lobby the legislature, even as quiet bystanders working on schoolwork, demonstrated the fusion of activism with the gendered responsibilities of mother and teacher.

The 1991 legislative session provided an opportunity for Ruzicka to demonstrate the extent of the changes she had brought to the Utah Eagle Forum. Supreme Court decisions had upheld abortion since the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973. Confronted with this reality, some states rewrote abortion laws to conform to *Roe* while others sought to restrict abortion within the parameters of the decision. The Court's *Webster v. Reproductive Services* decision in 1989 supported Missouri's restrictions on the use of public funds to suggest or perform abortions and implied to conservatives that abortion could be curbed.<sup>86</sup>

Conservatives across the country looked to state restrictions and bans as a way to force Supreme Court test cases. *USA Today* reported that thirty-eight state legislatures entertained abortion related legislation during their 1990 sessions. In Utah, a two-tiered abortion ban called the Abortion Limitation Act was proposed. The first tier of the ban permitted abortion only in cases of rape, incest, and grave birth defects, and to preserve the health of the mother. The second tier, which

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<sup>84</sup> Clark, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Box 2, Legislature, Senate's Standing Committee Minutes, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>86</sup> David M. O'Brien, *Constitutional Law and Politics: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties*, Volume Two, Sixth Edition (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 1229-1334.

would go into effect if the first tier failed a court test, was identical in intent but offered slightly less restrictive language relating to the health of the mother and fetal deformities. The proposed law privileged the protection of the unborn over the mother.<sup>87</sup>

The Utah Eagle Forum launched a vigorous and energetic campaign in support of the bill. "It was an exciting time, it was a hard time," Ruzicka recalled. "I traveled this state for public hearings all over. I lived and breathed it."<sup>88</sup> Over 175 people attended the joint meeting of the Senate and House Health Standing Committee, including ten identified Eagle Forum participants and fifty others who described themselves as pro-life.<sup>89</sup>

In a bold move on the day of the vote, the Eagle Forum left "baby-related trinkets" on the desks of state representatives.<sup>90</sup> Some representatives received small boxes with tiny, pink baby figures inside with a note that said, "It's my turn on Earth. Protect me until birth." Others were given rattles labeled "Baby's Best friend," with a card that said, "All Life is Precious - Please Vote to Save the Baby." The gifts undoubtedly increased tensions over the bill. The bill passed with little dissent, in spite of its million-dollar legal defense price tag. *The New York Times* called it "the toughest anti-abortion measure in the 50 states."<sup>91</sup> After passage, the

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<sup>87</sup> Steve Marshall, "Battle takes shape; State bills take varied approaches," *USA Today*, Feb 20, 1990, A6.

<sup>88</sup> Gayle Ruzicka, (speech, Utah Eagle Forum conference, Sandy, UT, Jan. 17, 2009).

<sup>89</sup> "Minutes of Special Joint Meeting: Senate and House Health Standing Committees," Jan. 21, 1991, "Health 1991" folder, Box 2, Legislature, Senate's Standing Committee Minutes, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>90</sup> John Keahey, "Despite Warnings, Senate OKs Abortion Bill," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 24, 1991, A1.

<sup>91</sup> Tamar Lewin, "Strict Anti-Abortion Law Signed in Utah," *The New York Times*, Jan. 26, 1991.

Eagle Forum was a tireless defender of the bill, which faced litigation throughout the 1990s.

The organization's intensity drew attention as the Eagle Forum grew in effectiveness. In 1993, the Salt Lake County school board was surprised when Forum participants investigated a proposed curriculum program and then appeared at a school board meeting to challenge the proposal. The Eagle Forum interpreted the initiative to build critical thinking skills as a ploy to encourage children to question parental authority. An article in *The Salt Lake Tribune* characterized the women as hysterical, emphasizing that the group of twenty women "came and shouted and yelled" in opposition.<sup>92</sup>

1994 was a particularly successful year for the Eagle Forum. Deeply committed to parents rights—the belief that schools are too liberal and should be more accountable to parents—the Eagle Forum joined forces with attorney Matt Hilton to produce a bill preventing non-educational testing and surveys of students that revealed personal and family information without parental permission. In what Ruzicka described as the "most spiritual experience [she'd] ever had at the Legislature with a piece of legislation," Ruzicka made repeated visits to the Governor's office with bill sponsor Senator Howard Stephenson to petition for the bill's inclusion on the legislative agenda. "I cried, I begged, I pleaded," she recounted. "God wanted that bill passed because it was for the children."<sup>93</sup> The bill was introduced at 11:30pm on the last night of the session and passed as the Utah

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<sup>92</sup> Samuel A. Autman, "Political Watchdog Groups Keeping an Eagle Eye on Utah Education," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, July 19, 1993, D1.

<sup>93</sup> Gayle Ruzicka (speech, Utah Eagle Forum conference, Sandy, UT, Jan. 17, 2009).



Family Education Rights and Privacy Act just before its midnight conclusion. While Ruzicka hailed its passage as “miraculous,” her persistent lobbying certainly helped.<sup>94</sup> The press dismissed the law as “innocuous” until teachers complained that incidental revelations in classroom discussion and child abuse reporting violated the legislation.<sup>95</sup> In spite of its later amendment, the Eagle Forum and its supporters continued to invoke terms like “divine intervention” when discussing the success of the measure.<sup>96</sup>

To sustain its legislative influence, the Eagle Forum began an aggressive campaign to ensure that members of the state legislature were sufficiently conservative. In Bountiful’s District 20, a suburban area in Davis County, Representative Nancy Lyon was a casualty of this purge. Lyon, director of a non-profit education organization and moderate Republican, won the seat in 1988 and had easily been reelected in 1990 and 1992.<sup>97</sup> With a record supporting education and following the LDS Church’s stance on abortion—only in circumstances of rape, incest or jeopardizing the health of the mother—Lyon felt that her reelection was assured. Lyon drew criticism from House conservatives when she opposed a bill allowing prayer in government meetings in 1993. Her support of a 1994 House debate on a law that would allow Medicaid recipients to receive abortions with public moneys garnered further displeasure.<sup>98</sup> Though Lyon herself did not support

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<sup>94</sup> Ruzicka, speech.

<sup>95</sup> Twila Van Leer, “House Bill that Prohibits Prying Questions has Utah Educators Running Scared,” *Deseret News*, Nov. 18, 1994; “Encouraging Extremism,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec 15, 1994, A24.

<sup>96</sup> Cornelia deBruin, “Eagle Forum Praised for Sticking to its Beliefs,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan 15, 1995, B2.

<sup>97</sup> “2 House Seats are on Ballot, Both are GOP,” *Deseret News*, June 21, 1994.

<sup>98</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “2 Pro-Life Groups Attack Lyon, Back Rival in Davis House Race,” *Deseret News*, June 27, 1994

the abortion bill, and in spite of its failure, Lyon became a target of Eagle Forum operatives. Surprised when Ted Bradford, a former juvenile court judge emerged as her challenger, Lyon soon found out that the Eagle Forum had recruited him.<sup>99</sup> The Eagle Forum had proven that it was able to extend its agenda beyond the phone tree to the ballot box.

Acting as a private citizen and not as an Eagle Forum president, Gayle Ruzicka, a resident of Utah County, publicly endorsed Bradford. Right to Life of Utah, a longtime Eagle Forum ally, and the Republican Coalition for Life, a group that Ruzicka had presided over in 1991, distributed fliers throughout Bountiful attacking Lyon's abortion record. Lyon lost the race by two hundred sixty-one votes.<sup>100</sup> "They really misrepresented what I stood for, what my position on abortion was. And the thing was, Gayle Ruzicka had not once challenged me on any of it... she just went behind the scenes and recruited somebody she knew she could control, and she did," Lyon recalled. "It was devastating."<sup>101</sup> Bradford's success was short-lived; without an Eagle Forum endorsement in 1996, he lost to a more moderate candidate. As a political watchdog, the Eagle Forum not only lobbied legislators but worked to secure a legislative base.<sup>102</sup>

Lyon was not the only incumbent to suffer the wrath of the Eagle Forum in the 1994 election. In the District 21 Republican primary race, also in Davis County, Eagle Forum participant Lori Roberts challenged eight-year incumbent Dave Steele.

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<sup>99</sup> Nancy Lyon, interview with author, Jan. 16, 2009, Salt Lake City, UT.

<sup>100</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "Utah Primary Elections Reflect Clout of Special-Interest Groups," *Deseret News*, July 1, 1994.

<sup>101</sup> Lyon, interview.

<sup>102</sup> Lois M. Collins, "GOP Primary Amiable and Hard-Fought," *Deseret News*, June 10, 1996.

The *Deseret News* reported that although Steele raised five times as much money as Roberts, he faced unexpected and heavy canvassing efforts by Roberts' Eagle Forum associates. In the end, Steele won, but conceded that he had no choice but to appease the Eagle Forum. "I learned that I have to listen to their concerns, be open to them."<sup>103</sup>

In the fall of 1995, gay rights became a consuming issue in Utah politics when a Gay/Straight Alliance club was formed at East High School in Salt Lake City. Infuriated at what it perceived as the validation of the "gay rights agenda" in the classroom, the Eagle Forum collected 6,000 signatures in just five days. The Salt Lake City School District responded with a sweeping ban on all non-academic clubs in its schools. Legislators passed a law preventing teachers from promoting illegal activities. Ruzicka appeared at the epicenter of the crusade, telling *The New York Times*, "We are going to win this battle -- and Utah will again be in the forefront... Homosexuals can't reproduce, so they recruit. And they are not going to use Utah high school and junior high school campuses to recruit."<sup>104</sup> She employed the rhetoric of parents' rights as she spoke against gay clubs and teaching about homosexuality in schools, differentiating between respect and what she classified as immorality. "I expect public schools to uphold my values. You can't. You don't. You shouldn't teach that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle."<sup>105</sup> For Ruzicka, there

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<sup>103</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "Races Show Special Interest Clout," *Deseret News*, August 6, 1994.

<sup>104</sup> James Brooke, "To Be Young, Gay and Going to High School in Utah," *The New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1996, B8.

<sup>105</sup> Katherine Kapos, "Gay Agenda In Schools Is Debated; Panel: It's Either About Respect or Recruitment," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct 10, 1996, B1.

was no compromise when it came to sexuality and public education and she vigilantly sought to press this stance.<sup>106</sup>

Some observers questioned how long the Eagle Forum could sustain its offensive, incorrectly believing that the Republican Party was the sole source of its power and influence. Ruzicka was chastised after she led a faction of Utah delegates at the 1996 GOP National Convention in making a show of support for the nomination of Pat Buchanan over Bob Dole.<sup>107</sup> In 1998, Ruzicka was denied a Highland precinct delegate position to the state Republican convention. *The Salt Lake Tribune* was quick to presume that her position as an alternate meant she had no voice on the convention floor.<sup>108</sup> However, regardless of how tired moderates became of Ruzicka, they lacked the grassroots resources that Eagle Forum claimed. Ruzicka was powerful because she could mobilize large numbers of activists who also exercised influence in their communities. The Eagle Forum shaped the Republican Party's image and agenda with bills against nude dancing and no-fault divorces. Members and supporters were party cadre. Party leadership was forced to reckon with an uncompromising and formidable ally who was not given to compromise.

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<sup>106</sup> Jennifer Skordas, "East High Students May Start Gay Club," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec 22, 1995, B1; Gwen Florio, "In Utah, School Clubs Banned to Stop Gay Meeting," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 23, 1996, A1; Katherine Kapos, "State School Board Seeks Stop to Controversial Clubs," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 12, 1996, D2; Tony Semerad, "Senate OKs Bill Aimed at Teachers Measure Prohibits School Workers From Promoting Illegal Acts," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb 24, 1996, E1.

<sup>107</sup> Paul Rolly, "Far Right Wing of Utah's GOP Irritates State Party Leaders Again," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb 20, 2000. A3.

<sup>108</sup> Judy Fahys and Dan Harrie, "Health of Republican Party's Right Wing May Be in Jeopardy; Is Ruzicka's ouster a sign that Utah's GOP is leaning more toward the center?" *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Apr. 13, 1998, B1.

In an effort to sustain growth and leadership, the Forum recruited teenagers as active participants. In 2003, the Eagle Forum's national organization partnered with the St. Louis Teen Eagles and created a "Teen Eagle" program to provide activities for youth in state Forum chapters. Utah's program sponsors study groups and trains teenagers for legislative internships. Teen Eagle interns attend legislative meetings and work as messengers during the session. They are groomed to maintain a proper appearance and demeanor. Interns play a vital role in recruiting the next generation of conservative activists. One Teen Eagle even convinced her politically active mother to join Eagle Forum.<sup>109</sup>

Although the Utah Eagle Forum has not formally endorsed candidates for election, it has used the phone tree, its periodic newsletter, and email notifications to spread political information. Conservative candidates have curried the Forum's support, convinced that its resources are integral to fighting challengers. In his 2008 run for Congress, Jason Chaffetz sought to unseat incumbent Representative Chris Cannon. Having maintained a positive relationship with the Eagle Forum while working in Governor John Huntsman Jr's office, Chaffetz understood the importance of an alliance with Eagle Forum. He took Gayle Ruzicka to lunch and told her of his plans to run. "I went forward and I kept checking in with her," Chaffetz told Eagle Forum conference attendees of his efforts to earn Ruzicka's confidence.<sup>110</sup> Although Representative Cannon scored a 96-point rating from the

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<sup>109</sup> "The Teen Eagle Story," St. Louis Teen Eagles, <http://stlteeneagles.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed Dec. 20, 2008); "Who We Are," Utah Teen Eagles, <http://www.utahteeneagles.com/who-we-are> (accessed Dec. 20, 2008); Dalane England, interview with author, July 9, 2008, Bountiful, UT.

<sup>110</sup> Jason Chaffetz, "Washington's Liberal Agenda," (speech, Utah Eagle Forum conference, Sandy, Utah, January 17, 2009).

American Conservative Union, he was too moderate for the Forum.<sup>111</sup> With strong grassroots support, Chaffetz won the Republican primary and the Congressional race. Of Chaffetz's campaign, Ruzicka recalled: "it was something done correctly."<sup>112</sup>

Chaffetz was not the only legislator in 2008 who relied on the Eagle Forum's grassroots strength. Chris Buttar, a Republican state senator from West Jordan, had been called "about as popular as anthrax" following allegations of racism.<sup>113</sup> A close friend and longtime ally of Ruzicka's, Buttar occupied an important spot on the Senate Rules committee, which controls which legislation reaches senate committees for debate. Because the Rules committee meets in closed session, Buttar was a valuable asset to the Eagle Forum. He also served as chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee, important committees that review proposed legislation on issues such as abortion and gay rights.

With much at stake, Ruzicka remembered spending "lots and lots of time" working for Buttar's victory at the Salt Lake County Republican convention; Vice-President Karen Clark also worked hard on the campaign.<sup>114</sup> Buttar carried sixty percent of the delegates in spite of a survey indicating that sixty-seven percent of his district thought he should not be reelected.<sup>115</sup> Buttar was aware of his debt: "Without this group, without the leadership of the Eagle Forum, I would've lost...

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<sup>111</sup> The American Conservative Union, "2007 Votes by State Delegation," The American Conservative Union, <http://www.acuratings.org/2007all.htm#UT>, (accessed Feb. 4, 2009).

<sup>112</sup> Bob Bernick, Jr., "What happened to Chris Cannon, anyway?" *Deseret News*, June 27, 2008; Sheena McFarland, "Utah going for Chaffetz, Matheson, Bishop," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Nov. 4, 2008; Gayle Ruzicka, (speech, Utah Eagle Forum conference, Sandy, Utah, Jan. 17, 2009).

<sup>113</sup> Lee Benson, "Dark, ugly session over for Buttar," *Deseret News*, March 7, 2008, B1.

<sup>114</sup> Ruzicka, interview; Clark, interview.

<sup>115</sup> Bob Bernick Jr. and Leigh Dethman, "Buttar gets nod from S.L. County GOP," *Deseret News*, May 4, 2008, A3.

You've rescued me a million times."<sup>116</sup> Engineering elections continues to be an important component of the Eagle Forum's activist strategy as it seeks to support legislators who will advance its agenda.

With the Eagle Forum, Gayle Ruzicka has become an established member of Utah's conservative elite. She relinquished her shrill and aggressive tactics of the early 1990s and focused on developing the organization's future leadership. Factionalism is avoided at conference by allowing participants to listen to speakers but not to participate in individual discussions through panels.<sup>117</sup> Just as the phone tree spreads a unified message, Eagle Forum conferences provide a gathering space for participants while guaranteeing little deviation from the organization's focused agenda. That the state chapter does not offer individual memberships further emphasizes the movement's collective voice. The Eagle Forum has cultivated an image of consistency, unity, and success in state politics. Whether through the phone tree, in legislative session, or at the ballot box, Ruzicka's organization has proven its ability to influence public policy.

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<sup>116</sup> Chris Buttars, "Common Sense Initiative" (speech, Utah Eagle Forum conference, Sandy, UT, Jan. 17, 2009).

<sup>117</sup> Ruzicka, interview.

## CONCLUSION

Phyllis Schlafly astutely recognized the potential for conservative politics in Utah. She also wisely sought alliances with members of the LDS Church. As a result, STOP-ERA played a crucial role in mobilizing conservative women in Utah. Dorothea Masur's belief that activism could be empowering to conservative housewives sustained STOP-ERA during its transformation into the Utah Eagle Forum. Gayle Ruzicka moved a step closer to influence by mobilizing Mormon women. This army of women shared a common commitment to morality and an abundance of crucial resources: time and energy. Employing the threat of the formidable phone tree, numerous chapters and an able legion of legislative lobbyists, Gayle Ruzicka let those in power know that they had little choice but to listen to the vocal minority.

Ruzicka gained influence in the Republican Party because she challenged politicians with a large and active group of citizens who attended caucuses, favored conservative candidates, spoke at legislative meetings, and petitioned leaders vigorously. Consequently, politicians felt the gaze of the Eagle Forum when issues of abortion, homosexuality, and parental rights emerged in the annual Utah state legislature. As aggressive guardians of traditional values, the Eagle Forum consistently and successfully persuaded conservative citizens to act and forced conservative legislators to pay heed.



The actions of these conservative female activists in an already conservative political climate suggest that since the 1980s, right-wing women's vision of citizenship on the right has expanded. Before, conservative women mobilized in neighborhoods in favor of candidates or in opposition to immediate threats. Such women were amateur activists whose power in politics was temporary and limited. The Eagle Forum pioneered a watchdog role for conservative women. They stand ever vigilant to thwart new dangers and enlarge the legislative boundaries of conservatism. They labor to safeguard the seats of their supporters. These tasks require continuing commitment and women are key. Said Ruzicka: "If there's something that's near and dear to you, you should pick up your phone and call your legislator. But everybody can't find out what's going on. We're at the legislature, we know what's going on, we're watchdogs for that and we put the information out."<sup>118</sup> Through this simple strategy, the Utah Eagle Forum harnessed the power of a conservative base to become a powerful factor in the making of public policy. Gayle Ruzicka is now regarded as a formidable figure in state politics and the Utah Eagle Forum enjoys a prominence unequalled by Eagle Forum chapters elsewhere.<sup>119</sup>

This efficacy is bound up in the Eagle Forum's appeal to women. Although men have become involved in recent years, women continue to lead the organization and disseminate its message. On matters of sexuality and education, the women of the Utah Eagle Forum have, as so many activists before them, spoken out not just as conservatives, Mormons, or Catholics, but as mothers and housewives. The Forum has convinced women whose lives focus on the private

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<sup>118</sup> Ruzicka, interview.

<sup>119</sup> Phyllis Schlafly, interview with author, July 23, 2008, St. Louis, MO.

sphere to engage public issues. As scholars study women's vision of citizenship, it is vital to understand that the message of empowerment has appeal beyond the traditionally understood parameters of feminist activism.

Historians and commentators have lately become concerned with the question of whether or not conservatism is dead or dying. The Utah Eagle Forum is evidence of its grassroots health. The Eagle Forum's successes suggest that evolution sustains conservative power. Most groups founded to fight the ERA lost relevance as soon as the battle was over; other conservative organizations have struggled to maintain salience. For nearly four decades, the Utah Eagle Forum has expanded its agenda to include a broad range of issues that embody the breadth of conservative thought. Focusing on state's rights, gun control, pro-life, parental rights, morality and strict constitutionalism, the Eagle Forum offers something for everyone. In Utah, conservatism is alive and well because the Eagle Forum continues to convince citizens that it is relevant without making concessions.

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